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MISSIONARY WORK AT RED WING, 1849 TO 1852.*

BY REV. JOSEPH W. HANCOCK.

During the latter part of the year 1848 an invitation was sent me by a former fellow student, to join him in laboring as a missionary among the aborigines of our country. He was about to graduate from the theological seminary near Cincinnati, Ohio. I had left my studies on account of poor health five years previously, and had been residing at Saratoga Springs, N. Y. My health had so much improved, by living at the Springs several years, that I had married and was engaged in teaching school there.

After due consideration of the matter, my wife and I concluded to offer our services to the American Board of Foreign Missions, to labor among the Dakota or Sioux Indians. Our offer was accepted and a commission was sent to us from the officers of the Board.

But it was now too late in the season to undertake the journey to the Northwest Territory. Facilities for traveling, especially in that direction, were not what they are now. Such a place as Minnesota was not then known. The location assigned to us was described as follows: "An Indian village on the west bank of the upper Mississippi river, a few miles above lake Pepin."

We postponed our journey till the following spring. During the month of March in that year, a new territory, called Minnesota, was formed by act of the United States Congress. So we learned, before we left the East, that our future home would be in Minnesota Territory.

*Presented at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, May 12, 1902. The author was born in Orford, N. H., April 4, 1816, and has lived in Red Wing since 1849.

FAREWELL TO THE OLD HOME, AND THE JOURNEY WEST.

Many friends living in the New England states seemed to claim a farewell visit from us before we could start for the west. We made therefore a tour of visiting in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, in the month of April, and we also met the officers of the mission board at Boston to receive such instruction as they would give. These visits consumed several weeks. Some time in May we returned to Saratoga Springs, packed our necessary housekeeping goods, and shipped them to a mercantile firm in Galena, Ill., as freight.

Bidding farewell to our neighbors and friends at our delightsome home in New York, we started in a stage coach for the west. At Schenectady we took cars for Buffalo, and thence came to Chicago through the great lakes by steamboat. There were no railroads from Chicago to the Mississippi at that time. Having been informed that a horse and open wagon would be needed at our destined mission station, I purchased such a conveyance while in Chicago, and with it we made our way to Galena. This was by far the most toilsome part of our journey. The highways were scarcely changed from their natural condition. The streams were without bridges, and many swampy places let our wagon wheels sink so that we were often "stuck in the mud." But we struggled on, gathering rich experience for future work in a new country, and after several days arrived safely in Galena. At that place we were detained a few days waiting for a steamer to take us to the end of our journey.

Our freight, shipped from Saratoga to this place, had not yet arrived. Being instructed by the missionary helper who was already at Red Wing, I purchased a stock of provisions and groceries, and also a good milch cow, while in Galena. With these additional equipments, we were transported on the steamer Franklin to our future home in a wigwam village.

ARRIVAL AT RED WING.

The last stage of the journey was accomplished without much labor or anxiety of mind. The natural scenery along the banks of the "Father of Waters" at that season of the year was new and enchanting. We made several acquaintances among our fellow passengers. One of them was Henry M. Rice, who

had for some years been engaged as a trader among the Indians. I shall never forget how he pointed out to me the place where I was to land. While we stood on the upper deck of the steamer, as it was plowing its way through lake Pepin, he said to me, "Look yonder," pointing up the river valley, "do you see that oval hilltop rising above the tall trees on the river's border?" "Yes," I answered. "Well, that marks the place where we are to leave you."

In about an hour our boat gave the signal for landing, as she turned toward the end of Barn bluff. As we slowly approached the shore, a large number of Indians from the village had collected, evidently eager to know why a steamboat should stop at their port. It was a strange sight to many of the passengers on board the boat, who were on their way to the new towns of St. Paul and Stillwater, to see such an array of painted faces gazing at them.

The Indians seemed glad to see us who landed among them. Men, women, and children, all gave us a hearty hand shake. Our belongings were soon dumped ashore, with the exception of the horse and cow. These two animals stoutly objected to being sent ashore. It was mainly by human strength that they were compelled to walk the plank. Evidently they had not been acquainted with painted faces and blankets. The thought of being now far separated from friends and excluded from the civilized portion of the world was not a pleasant one to us, but it seemed a greater grief to our horse and cow.

There were three white persons then living in the village, who soon met us with a hearty welcome, and assisted us to establish our home in a log-house. These were Rev. John F. Aiton and wife, who had been here a few months only, and Mr. John Bush, who had married an Indian wife, and who had been sent here to assist the natives as a farmer.

EARLIER MISSIONARIES TO THE DAKOTAS.

This Red Wing band of the Dakotas had been accustomed to white missionaries some years before we came, but these missionaries had given up the work and abandoned the place. They were from Switzerland. While here they built two very comfortable log dwelling houses. A small garden fenced with rails,

and other improvements, the result of their labors, awaited our occupancy.

The fact that these Swiss missionaries had gained the confidence of the people, and that their efforts had been appreciated, was made plain when they applied through their chief to the United States Indian agent at Fort Snelling for other missionaries to be sent to them. It is perhaps hardly necessary to add that our coming was the result of such application.

Two brothers, Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond, were the first American missionaries to the Dakotas. Drs. Thomas S. Williamson and Stephen R. Riggs soon followed them. But all of these were occupying stations northwest of Red Wing. The Pond brothers had been laboring beyond Fort Snelling about fourteen years. They had already reduced the language to writing, and a number of elementary works had been printed in the Dakota language. These books were a great help to us in the beginning. But in order to speak the language correctly, time, patience, and frequent conversation with the people, were absolutely necessary.

SCHOOL FOR THE INDIAN CHILDREN.

We spent the remainder of that summer in learning the language, and in doing what we could to teach the children how to read it. Books were sent us by the pioneer co-workers, similar to the "First Readers" used in our common schools, containing short simple sentences describing familiar objects and actions.

Some parents at first seemed unwilling to have their children come to us to be taught. Those who did come were very irregular in their attendance. It often happened that we had only three or four pupils a day, and these were generally unwilling to stay long in the schoolroom. To be kept in one room for any great length of time was quite against their nature. The work seemed like trying to tame a lot of young foxes.

To restrain them by force was utterly impracticable. The children were wild and loved freedom. It would not do for us to detain them in the schoolroom longer than they were willing to stay. It took months of patient and persevering labor, of bribing with cakes and raisins, to get the children into anything like regularity in their attendance at the mission school.

Occasionally the parents would interest themselves enough to give us their assistance, and after a time we began to have from twenty to thirty pupils a day. But the custom had become pretty well established that when a child had read one lesson, he or she could leave for that day. As they were permitted to come and go at their own pleasure, we might have a few pupils early in the day, who would read and then leave us; others coming later would do the same, and so on. Thus one teacher could easily attend to thirty or more the same day.

After the corn began to ripen in August, many of the older children were kept from coming to read. They were engaged in the cornfields to scare away the blackbirds. Soon after the corn was harvested, the people of the village began to prepare to leave their bark wigwams, take their tents, and go away for the winter.

It was their custom to separate into small companies, and to go in different directions into the woods to live during the cold weather. The bark houses at the village were only comfortable to live in during the summer. It required a little too much self-denial for us to follow them into the woods and dwell in skin tents all winter. Yet we learned that one of the Pond brothers tried the experiment.

Our native citizens were nearly all gone by the last of October for their winter hunt. The foreigners were left to themselves. But still there was work for us to do. We had as yet acquired but a limited knowledge of the language. We obtained a manuscript dictionary from the pioneer co-workers, which contained several thousand words of the Dakota tongue, with the definition of each in English. This we had for copying and study. But myself and wife were called to another field of labor during the winter.

REMOVAL TO LONG PRAIRIE.

About the first of November, 1849, Rev. David Lowry came to Red Wing with an urgent request that my wife and I would go with him to Long Prairie. There were openings for us as teachers in the government school for the Winnebago Indians at that place. He thought it too late in the season to obtain suitable teachers from the East.

The prospect that we should have no children to teach at Red Wing led us to consent to go for the winter. Packing up such clothing as would be needful, we were soon on board a steamer for St. Paul. From thence we traveled to Long Prairie in a lumber wagon drawn by two horses. At St. Paul we obtained a supply of provisions for the journey to the Winnebago reservation. The distance was said to be 150 miles, through an uninhabited wilderness. Our load was four passengers with their baggage and a driver. We left St. Paul on a Monday morning and arrived at our destination on the following Saturday. It was a long, lonely journey through the wilderness, the more fatiguing because on frozen ground. Through the forest the road passed over stumps where the trees had been cut down, leaving an open space wide enough for a team to go through.

We camped out at night by the primitive roadside, sleeping on the ground in blankets and buffalo robes around the campfire. We cooked our fresh beef by holding it on sticks before the fire. Such traveling was indeed a novelty. On the last day of the trip, while going over a stump, one of the axletrees of our wagon was broken, and we were at a standstill for a short time. Soon, however, the living part of the expedition was moving on, some going on horseback, and the rest on foot, leaving the lumber wagon and heavy baggage to be sent for another day. We arrived at our destination on Saturday evening after dark.

A GOVERNMENT INDIAN SCHOOL.

Long Prairie was then quite a large village of Winnebago Indians living in log houses. Their school was supported by the United States government. The school building contained two large rooms, one for the boys, the other for the girls. The work was very different from that we had at Red Wing. There were from fifty to seventy pupils, regular in attendance, and we taught them wholly in the English language. We enjoyed the winter there.

When spring opened we were earnestly requested to return to Red Wing. Mr. and Mrs. Aiton, our co-laborers there, had determined to leave the field and go back to the States. We were given to understand that, if we did not return, the Red Wing band would be left without teachers by the first of July.

As we had only asked leave of absence for the winter, we felt it a duty to return. The time for leaving Long Prairie was put off till June.

THE VOYAGE OF RETURN TO RED WING.

The spring had been backward and rainy. Streams and swamps were almost impassable for teams; and therefore, after due deliberation, we concluded to travel by water. We took the longest way round to be our shortest way home. Obtaining a skiff, we started on the Long Prairie river, which runs northerly and empties into the Crow Wing river. The latter runs easterly, and, we were informed, would convey us to the Mississippi river.

It was a bright morning in June when we went aboard our boat. Besides myself, wife, and our little child, a young man, wishing to leave the place, took passage with us for St. Paul. He was a great help to us, being skillful in the use of oars. With our necessary baggage we took provisions for several days, because we could not expect to see any human habitation until we should arrive at Fort Ripley. This fort was at the time occupied by United States soldiers, and was on the Mississippi a few miles below the mouth of the Crow Wing river.

We enjoyed our first day's journey down the winding stream, till the middle of the afternoon. Then we noticed that some clouds had begun to spread over the sky, hiding the sun. Soon muttering thunder was heard, and evidently a shower was near. We turned our boat to shore, and had just time to haul it upon the land and turn it bottom upwards, putting ourselves and lading underneath it, when the rain began to pour down in torrents. Shower after shower followed till night came on, and we remained there until the light of another day dawned upon us. The clouds had disappeared, and we launched our boat again.

Still and smoothly we passed along the winding stream. Before noon we entered a forest. As the forest became more dense our river began to widen out until it seemed to be covering the whole country. The frequent rains had caused a flood. Keeping as best we could in a northerly direction, we soon found that we had left the true channel by going into a bay. After rowing about between the tall trees for some time, and watching

the course of the currents, we found the way back into the Crow Wing river.

There we turned easterly, and had been pursuing our new course but a few hours when we were overtaken by three long birchbark canoes, filled with Indians. It was a delegation of Menominees, who, with their agent, had been looking over the country for a desirable place for settlement. They were now returning home. They came alongside with about twice our speed. Seeing one white man among them, I hailed him for information as to our present distance from Fort Ripley. He did not know the distance, but they expected to reach the fort by sunset of that day. It would be impossible, however, for us to get there in our skiff till near midnight. I asked them to take Mrs. Hancock and our baby aboard, and to put them in care of an officer's family at the fort. They granted my request, and the three canoes were soon out of sight.

The young man and I pushed on until after sundown. Then we tied up our craft and slept in the woods, or rather we should have slept if the multitudes of mosquitoes had let us alone. We re-embarked the next morning early, and arrived at the fort before noon, where we found my wife and child, who had been well cared for since we parted.

After a short rest our company were again on board the skiff, and were passing down the Mississippi river. The water was high and the current swift, and the boat moved on without hard rowing,—especially when we passed over Little falls and the Sauk rapids. Our little vessel went tossing up and down over the latter.

We met no further danger till we came to Saint Anthony falls, where we were fortunate enough to find a team of horses and a lumber wagon to convey us with our boat around the falls. Below them we launched again, and soon arrived at the village named St. Paul. From that point we obtained passage on a steamboat to Red Wing.

Our former Dakota friends, especially the children, gave us a hearty welcome. Frequent calls and warm handshakes were received from all the wigwams the first day. The other missionary family had left the place only a day or two before.

LIFE AT THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

Our first and most important work consisted in learning to use the Dakota language. The people were very kind to help us in this matter by using signs. The work of writing down new words with their meaning in English occupied the most of our spare moments.

A day school was opened for the children as soon as possible. While in St. Paul I purchased a good-sized hand bell, with which to let the children know the time to assemble at the schoolroom. This one step toward regularity was hailed with enthusiasm. I soon found another incentive quite helpful in securing regular attendance. I bought raisins by the box, and a few, such as a child could hold in one hand, given at the close of school, were almost sure to bring the child next day. I had learned that regular attendance at the government school at Long Prairie was the result of daily rations which were distributed to the children at the close of school.

The older people were very friendly, making frequent calls on us, and they aided us much in acquiring their language. They often came to ask for sugar or a little flour. But when they came after such things, they brought pay, either some fresh fish, a choice piece of venison, or wild fowl.

The women were engaged in the summer season a part of the time in their cornfields, besides attending to cooking, etc. The men were hunting and fishing to such an extent as to keep their families well supplied. They did not kill game just for sport. This country was then well stocked with wild game. I did not wonder that the Dakotas were so much opposed to selling it, when commissioners were sent to make a treaty with them in 1851.

Wisconsin had become a state only the year before we came to Red Wing. The western portion, above lake Pepin, had very few settlers for some years, owing to the fact that the land was then covered by a dense forest, which afforded great advantages to our Dakota hunters.

During the summer of 1849 one white man was living on the Wisconsin side a few miles above Red Wing, whose chief

employment consisted in furnishing wood for steamboats. He was then a bachelor, and used frequently to come to our services on the Sabbath.

But in this summer of 1850, we learned there was another settler who had built his shanty and laid claim to a quarter section of land a little farther up the Mississippi on the Wisconsin side. He did not prove a very good neighbor. It was soon learned that he was engaged in selling whiskey to anybody wishing to purchase. The inhabitants of our village, who were often hunting in the woods of Wisconsin, soon began to be his customers. They exchanged their pelts and furs, or whatever they had to spare, for whiskey. The trader could also furnish jugs and tin-pails, in which the hunters were able to bring some home for their friends.

EVIL EFFECTS OF WHISKEY.

Whenever a few gallons of whiskey (called "Minne wakan" by the Dakotas) were brought over to our village, we had an exciting time. An Indian did not consider himself responsible for what he did while drunk. Therefore, when even no more than three or four were drunk at one time, the whole village was in a state of alarm. A drunken Indian always seemed crazy to do some mischief. It was the custom of the sober ones to deprive those who were drunk of every dangerous weapon.

One warm summer day, while I was engaged with a number of pupils, the schoolroom door being open, a tall man, crazed with whiskey, rushed in upon us. The children were all frightened, and I was somewhat in the same condition, but tried not to appear so. He was without a blanket, and stalked around the room with an angry look. I finally took hold of one of his bare arms and led him to the open door, and he left.

Such disturbances became so frequent, toward the end of the summer of 1850, that I determined to do something to prevent them. Hailing a passing steamer, I took a trip to St. Paul, and called on Governor Ramsey, and told him of our trouble. I knew there was a company of United States soldiers at Fort Snelling, and asked if he could send some of them down to drive away the whiskey sellers. The Governor expressed his indignation that such a trade was going on, but Wisconsin was a sovereign state, entirely beyond his jurisdiction, and I must go

to the proper authorities for redress. Of course a poor missionary could not spend the time, nor incur the expense, of a journey to Madison, Wisconsin, as traveling facilities were then.

I did some temperance work among the Dakota people during the few years they remained at Red Wing, an account of which is given in a history of Goodhue county, published in 1893.

Whiskey could be obtained on the opposite side of the river at any time for money, furs, or anything valuable which an Indian could part with. They were not moderate drinkers. They wanted enough to make them drunk when they wanted any. Several would put their valuables together, go over and purchase several gallons of whiskey, bring it to the village, and then have a grand spree. As an Indian was not responsible for what he did when drunk, these sprees often ended in injury to some one, and custom gave the injured one no redress. Consequently, when but a few men were crazed with whiskey, the whole village was on the watch. Every dangerous weapon had to be taken from them, and the children were kept out of sight if possible.

I remember being called upon early one morning to dress a wound which had been inflicted upon the head of a woman by a drunken man with a hatchet. Only a week or so afterward I was walking by the tepees and heard a woman cry out, "Now they come with it." I looked around. She pointed to the river, saying, "Minne wakan." I saw a canoe approaching from the Wisconsin side, and waited at the head of the path which led up the bank from the landing. There were six young men in the canoe. They came up the path in single file, the leader carrying a tin pail with a cover. I asked what he had brought in the pail. He answered, "Minne wakan." I snatched the pail from him, and its contents were immediately soaking into the ground. Loud talk followed. I told them that whiskey was their worst enemy, that it was the cause of nearly all our troubles. I told them that it was unlawful to bring it on our side of the river, and advised them to stop bringing it. The young men looked somewhat ashamed, but offered me no violence.

I was told by some one a little later that the leader had said that he would bring more whiskey over, defying the missionary to spill it. Only a few more days passed before he made the

attempt. The first intimation I had was when a man rushed hurriedly into the mission house and called me to come out. I went out and saw those same young men marching toward the house in single file. The leader was carrying a two gallon jug in front of him, boldly affirming that it was whiskey. I took it as a challenge. Grasping the jug with both hands, I tried to pull it from him, but in vain, for the reason that a strong cord which reached around the back of his neck was tied to the handle. He had kept the cord covered by his blanket so that I did not see it until after my vain attempt. However, I soon managed to draw out the cork and inverted the jug in spite of all his struggles to prevent it. Not one of his companions offered to help him. It took several minutes for all the whiskey to gurgle out of the jug. Meantime I was dragged around by the hair of my head, but I kept the jug inverted till it was empty.

By this time a large number of the Indians had come to see the sport. My antagonist immediately threw the empty jug upon the ground in an angry manner. Evidently not liking to give up as entirely conquered, he stretched himself at full length on the ground just before the door of the mission house. The people began to disperse to their homes; and I kindly asked him to go too. He declared he would not. After waiting a while, I took a piece of rope and slipped one end around his ankles, tying his feet together. I then took the other end of the rope over my shoulder and dragged him several rods. He begged to be let up, promising to go away. The rope was untied, he got up, and went peacably away.

If any more whiskey was brought over to Red Wing by those Indians, it was carefully concealed from me. Subsequently I obtained pledges from about twenty of the leading members of the band to cease, for a time, from the use of whiskey, and only in one case did I hear of the pledge being broken.

THE DAKOTA DICTIONARY.

For the first two years I spent at Red Wing, I was busy, in spare moments, in writing out a dictionary of Dakota words in alphabetic order, giving to each its definition in English. This work was first accomplished by the older missionaries, I only copying from theirs. I finished this dictionary in July, 1851.

It consists of 409 closely written pages of foolscap paper, and has over 16,000 Dakota words with their meanings in English.

About this time I had become so well acquainted with the language as to be able to speak it with a reasonable degree of accuracy, and ventured to appoint a religious service for each Sabbath, to which the Indians were invited. The children who attended school during the week days were generally present. Only a few adults came at first. All seemed to be interested. But the year 1851 was a year of great excitement among these people.

THE TREATY OF 1851, FROM THE INDIAN STANDPOINT.

A treaty with the United States government, for the sale of their land, was to be made. This news had been disseminated for months in advance. The Red Wing band were much opposed to any such treaty, and talked over their opposition very plainly. Some of the younger warriors, as it was known, declared they would shoot the first chief or head man who signed the treaty. But at the beginning of August of that year the summons came for all the seven bands of Mdewakantonwans to assemble at Mendota to meet the United States commissioners.

This call made a long vacancy in our school and missionary work. The treaty was made, in spite of all the opposition. Our people came back with a discontented look. They seemed from that time to have lost all interest in our labors for the children's education, or in their own improvement. They felt discouraged, and it was no wonder. They would soon be obliged to leave their home, where their departed friends were buried, to be henceforth occupied by strangers, and must go themselves to a strange land.

My labors were continued among the children, teaching them first to read their own language. Some of the older pupils learned English, and made a start in arithmetic and geography, before they were all removed to their new home in 1853.

When it is remembered that we could have schools only during the season for corn raising, that the children could have no books to use during the winter, and that many interruptions occurred in the village during the summer, no one can wonder that progress in education was not great. Besides the excite-

ments caused by whiskey, we had war parties, scalp dances, medicine feasts, and raw fish dances, which were frequent throughout the summer.

White settlers commenced to make their claims at Red Wing in 1852. The Indians were all removed the following year, and my work for their benefit ceased.

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